

Ads, Ads Everywhere

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By BENJAMIN BARNIER

As Stephen King releases his new thriller "Cell," cell phone users can buy ring tones starring the renowned horror novelist saying, "Beware, the next call you take may be your last."

The ad campaign marks the first time in book publishing history that cellular telephones will be used to promote a novel.

"Stephen King is an unorthodox writer, and we wanted an unorthodox campaign," said Suzanne L. Balaban, director of publicity at Scribner, publisher of King's new novel.

The campaign for King's new book represents an unorthodox but popular marketing style that relies on social and cultural trends -- like the popularity of computers and next-generation cell phones -- to create "buzz" and add interactivity to inactive products.

Advertisers Target Technology

Before "Cell" hits bookstores, thousands of cell phone-owning Stephen King fans will be invited by text message to join the "Stephen King VIP Club" as part of the new book's release.

It's part of the growing trend that has advertisers clamoring to get their message out on popular devices like cell phones.

But even with the ability to sell "wallpaper" background images, ring tones and even use video commercials on handhelds, the mobile ad market in particular still faces major challenges.

"There really is not a market yet," said Robert Rosenberg, president of Insight Research Corp.

Mobile ad sales only reached \$45 million in 2005, according to Ovum Inc., compared with billions of dollars in revenue for mobile communications.

And consumers are still very resistant to such advertising, according to Edward Snyder, founder of Charter Equity Research, which studies the telecom industry.

"If you push ads, you are going to irritate users," said Snyder.

Still, for advertisers seeking an innovative way to reach out to their audience, technology that can carry a message will do.

A "Lean Forward" Experience

For hit ABC-TV show "Lost," advertisers came up with a surreptitious and original way to market the show.

As fans of the program know, "Lost" follows a group of people who've crash-landed on a strange island where something seemingly supernatural resides.

Playing off the mystery surrounding the island and the show's eerie tone, a phony Web site for the fictitious and ill-fated Oceanic Airlines was created with hidden clues sprinkled throughout the site.






"Television programs, advertisers, networks, they're trying to engage people and create a kind of interactivity with the programming and extend whatever situation is created through the TV programming into something that is more engaging for the user," said analyst Shar Vanboskirk at Forrester Research.

"It also satisfies an interest in being in the inner circle," she said, "feeling like you've got access to something that maybe everybody else didn't."


She says these interactive ad campaigns offer fans a way to participate, rather than just being passive observers.

"I can 'lean forward' and work on my computer and have sort of an interactive experience through a number of sites or activities that I do online," she said, "as opposed to a 'lean back' experience I


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can have with my television."

Thinking Outside the Xbox

Some companies combine both traditional and interactive marketing campaigns in an effort to make a bigger splash. Chris Di Cesare, director of marketing for the Xbox game console, says he followed all the normal conventions to promote the hit video game "Halo 2."

"We did all of the advertising you'd expect with a big release like 'Halo 2,'" he explained, "movie trailers, television advertisements, print ads."

But acknowledging the Internet-savvy, gadget-obsessed audience for the game, Di Cesare tried something a little unconventional, too.

By setting up a Web site called "I Love Bees," the team created a game that revealed "Halo 2's" back story and led fans right to the title's launch.

Did it work?

"The result was the biggest day [in earnings] in entertainment history," he said proudly.

ABC News' Jonathan Silverstein contributed to this report.

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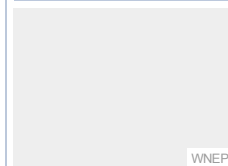
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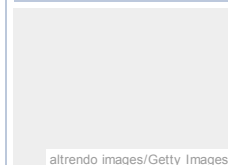
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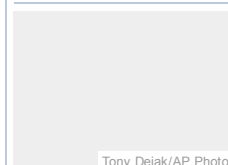
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